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ABSTRACT

Effective teacher evaluation rests on the discovery of the essence of teaching excellence. It is important to evaluate the essence of great teaching from as many perspectives as possible. Incompetent administrators make an effective teaching program impossible. To improve the teacher evaluation process, first look at the administrator evaluation process and the school board's self-evaluation process. Teacher evaluation can be viewed on three different levels. One is to determine termination of employment, one is to monitor teacher effectiveness, and the third encourages continued growth and development of teachers. Evaluation leading to termination can be called "intensive care" since termination should only come after a period of intensive documentation and corrective efforts. The second approach is rather superficial and may take the form of a "check list" to monitor attitudes, skills, and behaviors. The third approach, called "evaluation for growth," must be voluntary, conducted by a trusted person, and may contain such approaches as interviews, student feedback, self-assessment, and supervisor evaluation. The challenge is to eliminate incompetent teachers and at the same time help good teachers move toward higher levels of excellence. (Author/JM)

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EVALUATING YOUR TEACHING STAFF

By

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INTRODUCTION

Evaluation, what an interesting word. It is one of the most frequently used words in education today. Board members, teachers, principals, students, superintendents, parents -- everyone seems to be talking about evaluation. Evaluation of the skills, attitudes, and behaviors of teachers is a very important issue to all of us.

I must confess to you today that in many ways I am afraid of the word evaluation. I'm afraid of the experience of evaluation in many settings. I know as I stand before each of you today I am being evaluated. You may be asking yourself, why did I sign up or sneak into this meeting? Will I agree with what that skinny guy has to say? What new understandings will I be able to take with me? What will I be able to tell my friends about my experiences two hours from now? I'm certain you will be evaluating me and the effectiveness of this session. Each of you will have slightly different criterion and even though we will experience the same situation, your evaluation of it will be tempered by your own experiences as well as your goals and aspirations. Some of you will give me an excellent rating while others may leave with just the opposite view.

I'm afraid of evaluation for several reasons. One is that I have been evaluated thousands of times. Most of the time the formal evaluations have come out quite favorably, but sometimes I want to run from the apparent

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reality. Yes it is rather natural for us to have some apprehensions about evaluation. I have less fear, however, about my ability to evaluate others. I think it is always easier for us to evaluate others than to accept evaluation from others. This is another apparent reality which makes the evaluative process most difficult.

SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN EVALUATION

Let me tell you about my first grade teacher and my second grade teacher and my second grade teacher. Yes, I had Theta Helen for three years. She had two classes in the same room and it took me three years to move beyond her two grades. You're right, she evaluated me and gave me plenty of red E's. In those days, the grading system was A, B, C, D, E. As a young child, I thought the red E's stood for excellent. She defined them as failure.

Theta Helen had standards and she loved to evaluate. She wanted me to be good in reading, spelling, penmanship, posture and arithmetic. I was good in friendship, movement and marbles. In fact I constantly gave myself A's in marbles. You see we always played for keeps and my marble bag became larger and larger. My eyes would always light up when I saw the chance to acquire another big, beautiful marble. When it came to reading, however, I was very poor and in spelling, even worse. In penmanship I was terribly inconsistent and in posture a real slump. I was good in math because I practiced most of the time by adding and subtracting my marbles. I thought I had lots of marbles, but Theta thought I had either lost them or never had any marbles. Theta loved to evaluate and I loved to perform. Somehow, however, our worlds seemed to seldom come together.

Theta Helen had many positive qualities I can recall. She had cleanliness, perfume, beautiful clothes, super hairdos, education, and power. She flunked me! The second time around she was doubly determined to make something of me. In fact she was so determined that she decided to individualize her instruction with me, apparently a strategy she had recently learned in a methods class. As a result I was frequently singled out to help her clean her chalkboards, arrange the lunch buckets as well as practice my penmanship during recess or after school. During my third year in her classroom, the two of us spent a considerable amount of time together.

I'll never forget one particular day she kept me in for recess. As soon as all the other kids had filed out, she came to me, took my hand and led me to a back room. There was a little desk there where she sent her discipline problems. About the time we arrived at the desk, she informed me that I never again would be failing a spelling test. I was fearful but delighted since I hated failing tests. I thought at last she had found a way to activate my learning. Just as my hopes began to build she brought from behind her a big brown stick and began to use it on my posterior. It hurt my backside and literally crushed my feelings. I cried and sobbed most of the rest of the day. Today they call the method she used, motivational discipline. And it must have worked because I never failed another spelling test, at least not under Theta Helen.

Theta Helen's method of using the big brown stick had some additional learning for me as well. I learned to fear teachers, hate school, despise books, tremble at tests, become sick and miss more school days. I must confess to you that today I am still a lousy speller, but the person who processes my

dictaphone tapes is fantastic at spelling. Today I am still not the world's best writer, but I love to talk. Today I do much reading in order to learn but much prefer to acquire information from tapes, television, film and dialogue. Educational practitioners most likely diagnose my dominant modality of learning as auditory.

I am convinced this experience taught me much about teacher evaluation but my fourth-grade teacher also taught me much about evaluation. I had a fourth-grade teacher, Marion Blue, who most likely did not have nearly as much formal education as Theta Helen, but I believe she knew a lot about learning. She knew what it was to be aware of the uniqueness of her students and to love them as human beings. She found that when I blushed and became tense in group reading, there were better approaches to help me improve my reading. She knew that when I became tense, the first thing she had to do was to release my emotional tension in order to free me to more effectively learn. She conversed with me freely and encouraged me to converse with her. She changed my life! Thanks to her encouragement within a few years I was an honor student and graduated amongst the top of my high school class.

THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE TEACHING/LEARNING PROCESS

My two elementary teachers and many others in education have driven me toward a lifelong search of striving to discover the essence of effective teaching. In my search, I became a teacher myself, a teacher trainer and an educational researcher. I'm still striving to discover the essence of what constitutes highly successful teaching and learning. This topic has been my search for 23 years and I think I'm beginning to acquire a slight glimpse of the essence

of the teaching/learning process.

Of one thing I am certain. Until we discover the essence of excellence in the teaching/learning process, any attempt toward effective teacher evaluation will be of limited effectiveness. Therefore, the first step in teacher evaluation is to define what is the essence of excellence in teaching and then seek to measure such excellence from as many perspectives as possible. The presence or absence of excellence in the teaching/learning process is what we must seek to evaluate. From my perspective, the best way to study the essence of great teaching is to study in-depth the attitudes, skills and behaviors of as many great teachers as possible.

The study of excellence in teaching is not new. There have been many educators in history who have tried to define the essence of great teaching. In fact the founder of the Christian Brothers, for example, did extensive study of the essence of great teaching and even wrote a book on the topic which has been studied for many years by his followers. There are also many current books out on the subject such as the recently published book entitled, Kids Don't Learn From Teachers They Don't Like. There have been many studies on great teachers but some of the best contemporary studies I know about have merged out of some of the research beginning in the early 1950s at the University of Nebraska. These studies are continuing today primarily through the research of SRI Perceiver Academies in Lincoln. These studies of great teachers over the years have taken many forms but their essence has been to explore in as much depth as possible the life themes of highly effective teachers. Such studies have resulted in some broadly defined theme areas they purport to be manifested in outstanding teachers. The listings of the qualities of outstand-

ing teachers defined by these researchers are not unique since other researchers have worked with the same basic concepts. This organization, however, has put together some definitions of great teachers and followed through with the development of assessment instruments which help people with less research skills and knowledge to practically apply the concepts in the evaluation of teachers. Some of the teaching qualities they are seeking to evaluate are empathy, individualized perception, objectivity, listening, and a positive mission toward the development of youth.

Regardless of how you choose to define great teaching, the first charge of any person seeking to effectively evaluate teachers is to develop a conceptualization and understanding of the essence of excellence in teaching. The next step is to develop a variety of instruments to objectively evaluate the essence of great teaching in the lifestyle of the teacher. It is important from my perspective to evaluate the essence of great teaching from as many perspectives as possible. Self-evaluation, evaluation from supervisors, evaluation from peers and administrators, evaluation from students and evaluation from parents are some possible audiences one might consider in the evaluation process. Later I will be sharing with you more details of some evaluation strategies but I would like to switch to another area which must be considered before giving you details about evaluation strategies.

TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEMS ARE NO BETTER THAN THE PERSONS USING THEM

Regardless of the strategy of teacher evaluation you choose to use, the instruments are no more effective than the people using them. We know it is impossible for a student to be effectively evaluated by an incompetent teacher; who has no insights or strategies regarding what is important for the student to learn or how it should be measured. It is likewise impossible to have an

effective teacher evaluation system with incompetent administrators. People ultimately are the evaluators. In order to have a highly effective evaluation system for teachers, it is therefore crucial that we have a highly skilled and competent group of administrators who understand in depth the essence of excellence in the teaching/learning process. I've had the privilege of visiting hundreds of schools from coast to coast and have yet to see a highly effective teacher evaluation program implemented and maintained without the support, assistance and hard work of highly skilled administrators. I'm convinced that the best system of teacher evaluation available is no better than the administrator whose job it is to carry out the task. I believe the level of commitment and competence of administrators in this area is generally at a very low level in most school districts. In fact all too frequently the teacher evaluation process becomes busy work for both the administrator and the teacher which therefore is a waste of professional time as well as the taxpayers money. Board members in virtually every district I visit tell me they are dissatisfied with the evaluation process of teachers. Most board members tell me they are receiving information from their administrators which report that virtually every teacher in the district is very good or excellent as a teacher. Board members by and large do not believe such reports and want more effective evaluation procedures.

GOOD TEACHER EVALUATION STARTS AT THE TOP

If you want to improve the teacher evaluation process in your district, I encourage you to look at the administrator evaluation process currently being used in your district. I also encourage you to take a careful look at how you are evaluating your own effectiveness as school board members. A teacher

evaluation system is no stronger than the strengths of your administrators and your commitment as board members to effectively evaluate yourself as well as district administrators from the superintendent on down is a vital component toward improving teacher evaluation. What is your evaluation process of board members and the superintendent? Have you clearly defined what it is you expect of yourself as board members and top level administrators? Furthermore, have you developed in depth systematic ways to assess your performance and effectiveness. If you have grave doubts about the effectiveness of your teacher evaluation process, I urge you to begin to get your own house in order first.

TEACHER EVALUATION ALTERNATIVES

Now let me return directly to the topic of teacher evaluation. It seems to me that anytime we become involved in teacher evaluation it is helpful for us to think about the process at three different levels. One level of evaluation is for termination of employment. A second level is an on-going monitoring of the effectiveness of all teachers. A third level is an evaluation process which encourages the continued growth and development of teachers. Currently most board members seem to want to focus upon effective evaluation procedures for termination. Although this is an important task, I believe it is much more important in the long run for school districts to be evaluating teachers for the primary purpose of assisting them in their continued growth and development as teachers. The problem which exists, however, is that all too often evaluation systems for termination and evaluation systems for growth and development of teachers conflict with one another. A principal may be successfully evaluating teachers in a way which encourages their growth but as soon as he or she begins an evaluation process for the termination of one of the teachers in the building, the fears of all teachers become heightened and the evaluation for

growth process goes out the window.

I would like to encourage you to formally develop your district teacher evaluation approaches which clearly separate teacher evaluation for growth from teacher evaluation leading toward dismissal. The two systems should be totally separate in form and detail from each other. Furthermore, it is essential that all teachers understand precisely the specific nature and intent of the evaluation approach in which they are participating. Let's take a look at three distinct evaluation systems.

INTENSIVE CARE is the term I choose to use to describe a critical situation in which the teacher is likely to be terminated after a period of intensive documentation. The problem areas need to be clearly defined in writing as well as specific plans to attempt to correct the shortcomings. Under this plan the teacher behavior and attitudes must be carefully monitored over a period of time, usually not to exceed three months. During this period of time, continued problems need to be closely monitored and documented in writing. Consistent review must be built into this process as well. The best district example I know of in the intensive care area has been developed by the Salt Lake City schools. This particular plan happens to be a cooperative effort between the teacher association and the administrators. Copies of their plan are available upon request.

I would like to call the second evaluation approach the CHECK-UP. The check-up is an evaluation approach which is required of all teachers but is limited in depth. Usually this approach takes the form of a check list which monitors accepted attitudes, teaching skills and behaviors. The check list will usually

contain standards of minimal or acceptable work. Reports under this plan will be given to the board which will indicate teachers who are conforming to at least minimum standards of teaching performance with minimum value judgment placed upon the quality of performance. The board will merely understand that the teachers have received a check-up and that their teaching during a given point in time is adequate.

The third evaluation approach is one I like to call EVALUATION FOR GROWTH. This approach is entirely voluntary and the evaluative information is only available to the teacher. Any information collected in this approach remains highly confidential and will never be used in a negative way against the teacher at any point in time. The person who assists in the collection of the data is also a person in which the teacher has a high trust level. The person assisting in the evaluation must be committed to using all information gathered to help the teacher continue to become better as a person and as a teacher.

I've been working with school districts in the development of evaluation for growth plans for several years and have found this approach to be the most positive in terms of results. Such an approach has led toward much growth on the part of many teachers and administrators, as well as several career changes which have occurred in an atmosphere of acceptance and affirmation of the person as a human being. Some of the best work in this area has been conducted in the Worthington, Ohio Public Schools and the West Bend, Wisconsin schools. Usually the evaluation for growth plans include such evaluation approaches as a structured interview, student feedback, self-assessment, and evaluation from supervisors based upon clearly defined criteria of excellence

in teaching.

Any school district wishing to inaugerate an evaluation for growth plan for their teachers or administrators should consider many basic factors. Several of the factors to be considered are as follows. What is the essence of excellence in teaching? Where is the teacher right now in terms of his or her development toward excellence? What new learning experiences will this person need to have in order to acquire increasing levels of excellence? What resources will be needed in order to assist this person in his or her continued development? And what are the intended measurable outcomes of such an evaluation growth plan? Evaluation for growth plans have been extremely helpful in school districts since they are clearly supportive of excellent teachers in a manner which continues to enhance their growth. Furthermore, it encourages good teachers to move toward higher levels of excellence in specific areas.

CONCLUSIONS

I do not want to suggest to you that the evaluation of teachers within schools is an easy process. Indeed it is one of the most complex tasks we have in education. We know that teaching basic skills such as reading, writing and math are critically important in the learning process. We also know that it is important for people to learn how to solve problems and to move toward life pursuits in highly positive and constructive ways. We know it is not only important to have knowledge and information, but it is also important to use such knowledge and information in a manner which enables one to continue to grow and develop as a human being while at the same time being supportive and enhancing the growth of others. The precise ways in which teachers intermix the technical as well as the helping skills in the teaching/learning process

is critically important.

I believe Theta Helen had every good intent when she was working with me as a first and second grade teacher. I believe she tried as hard as she could to assist me in the development of some basic skills. The problem as I see it, however, was that she lacked an understanding of me as a unique human being and how to most effectively help me to learn. To some degree she reminds me of the medical profession a hundred or more years ago when doctors were trying to help patients become well through removing their blood. If her administrator were to rate her on a standard check list, she most likely would have been given an acceptable rating for she taught many students to read and write. An evaluation for growth plan, however, likely would reveal many areas needed for continued growth in order for her to move toward excellence in teaching.

My fourth grade teacher was very good at understanding me as a unique person. She had excellent empathy toward me and was very fine in applying human relationship skills. She most likely would be rated as an adequate teacher as well. If she were involved in a careful evaluation for growth plan, however, her helper may have found several ways in which she might improve her technical skills.

Great teaching is a combination of acquiring knowledge and skills at high levels of excellence. It is also having deep insights about people and how individuals learn. The challenge to all of us in education is to continue to perfect our understandings of great teachers and continue to evaluate and encourage teachers toward even higher levels of excellence. I challenge you to continue to advocate and work toward more effective ways to evaluate teachers in a manner which eliminates incompetent teachers, yet at the same time helps good and great teachers move toward higher levels of excellence.